DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 752 FL 027 914

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TITLE	English Language Learners and the No Child Left Behind Act.
INSTITUTION	Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, Aurora, CO.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	14p.
CONTRACT	ED-01-CO-0006
AVAILABLE FROM	Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, 2550 South Parker Road, Suite 500, Aurora, CO 80014-1678. Tel: 303-337-0990; Fax: 303-337-3005; e-mail: info@mcrel.org; Web site: http://www.mcrel.org.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT	Changing Schools; Fall 2003
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Standards; Educational Legislation; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Federal Legislation; *Language Proficiency; *Limited English Speaking; *State Standards
IDENTIFIERS	*No Child Left Behind Act 2001

ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) on English language learners (ELLs). Title III of NCLB describes specific requirements that states and districts must meet in educating ELLs. In February 2003, the U.S. Department of Education released non-regulatory guidance on the Title III state formula grant program, stating that "The major goals of Title III are to help ensure that limited English proficient children attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic competence in English, and meet the same challenging state academic content and student achievement standards" as all other students. States are required to develop English language proficiency standards and implement English proficiency tests. They must also develop annual achievement objectives for increasing the English language proficiency of ELLs and assessing their progress in speaking, reading, writing, listening, and comprehension. State language proficiency standards must be linked to state academic standards. States are in the process of developing new English language proficiency assessments for ELLs. Rural schools may face specific challenges when working to meet the needs of ELLs (e.g., having to develop ESL programs from scratch). The NCLB grants states flexibility in designing programs that are most appropriate for their needs, although appropriately serving ELLs and meeting legislative requirements may entail creative solutions by states, schools, and districts. (SM)

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English Language Learners and the No Child Left Behind Act

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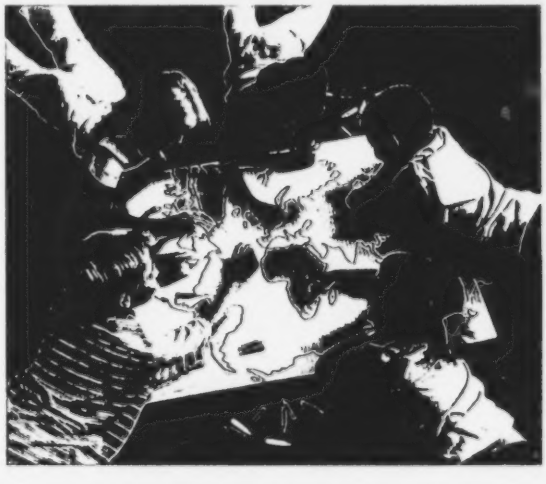
English Language Learners and the No Child Left Behind Act

The number of English language learners in U.S. public schools has surged over the past decade. As of the 2000–2001 school year, there were more than 4.5 million English language learners enrolled in public schools, an increase of more than 32 percent over the 1997–1998 school year. As these increases continue, the question of how best to meet the needs of these students becomes more pressing. New legislative requirements and state budget crunches have added to the complexity of the issue.



Specific Challenges

Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) lays out specific requirements that states and districts are to meet in educating English language learners. In February 2003, the U.S. Department of Education released non-regulatory guidance on the Title III state formula grant program, further clarifying these requirements. According to the guidance, "The major goals of Title III are to help ensure that limited English proficient (LEP) children attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic competence in English, and meet the same challenging State academic content and student achievement standards that all children are expected to meet."

Under Title III, states are required to develop English language proficiency standards and implement English language proficiency tests. States also must put into place annual achievement objectives for increasing the English language proficiency of English language learners and assessing their progress. Assessments must address five domains of language proficiency: speaking, reading, writing, listening, and comprehension.

An important criterion for a state's language proficiency standards, as described in NCLB, is that they be linked to the state's academic standards. Linking these standards is intended to help ensure that gains in students' English language proficiency translate into improved understanding of academic content. Because some English language learners have little formal education, it is critically important that their language learning include familiarity with the academic content that their peers have mastered at earlier grades.

Given the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, states are in the process of developing new English language proficiency assessments for English language learners. To address this issue, a number of Central Region and Western educators have come together to form the Mountain West Assessment Consortium.

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Rural Caucuses Convened

Although the needs of rural schools and districts frequently mirror those of urban and suburban districts, rural areas can face unique challenges in addressing those needs. Geographic isolation and lower salaries can lead to difficulties in recruiting highly qualified teachers, and declining enrollments can lead to corresponding declines in funding. And because education policy and funding formulas are often geared toward urban and suburban schools, rural schools may find it difficult to acquire the resources they need to address their particular challenges.

In an effort to address these and other issues, Rural Education Caucuses have been formed in both the House and Senate chambers of Congress. Though the caucuses have no official regulatory authority, they will monitor the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in rural schools and will serve as a forum for discussion of legislation affecting rural schools. According to Senate Rural Education Caucus Co-Chairman Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY), "I helped form the Senate Rural Education Caucus because rural schools and districts face very different challenges than their urban and suburban counterparts. I believe the Senate, and more importantly the students in rural America, will benefit from the discussion and actions that can be attributed to the Senate Rural Education Caucus."

In addition to Sen. Enzi and his co-chairs, Sens. John Edwards (D-NC), Susan Collins (R-ME), and Kent Conrad (D-ND), the Senate caucus includes 34 members. The House Rural Education Caucus is chaired by Reps. Denny Rehberg (R-MT), Ron Kind (D-WI), Tom Osbourne (R-NE), and Collin Peterson (D-MN) and is made up of more than two dozen legislators. The committees intend to work closely together in addressing issues common to rural schools.

Because rural schools, with their smaller student populations, can be at a disadvantage when receiving formula grant funding, the caucuses are expected to keep a particularly close eye on funding issues. Sen. Enzi notes that ensuring that rural communities have access to necessary resources is critical to creating successful education policies, as is bringing together policymakers and other interested parties to discuss rural education issues. The rural caucuses will work to ensure that rural educators have access not only to the financial resources needed to make their schools and districts successful, but also to the education experts and research that can best help them meet their students' needs. Among other activities, caucus members intend to explore ways that technology can be used to improve rural education. The committees also will generate joint letters of support for programs that benefit rural education.

The rural caucuses will work to ensure that rural educators have access not only to the financial resources needed to make their schools and districts successful, but also to the education experts and research that can best help them meet their students' needs.

The caucuses will work in close cooperation with the U.S. Department of Education to ensure that rural schools and rural education issues receive appropriate attention from the federal government, not only in conjunction with the No Child Left Behind Act but with broader issues as well, such as special education, higher education, and vocational education. U.S. Department of Education Secretary Rod Paige has formed a rural education task force to identify the challenges facing rural schools, and has pledged to fully support the activities of the House and Senate caucuses as they move forward.

State Accountability Systems and Student Achievement

Carnoy, M., & Loeb, S. (2002). Does external accountability affect student outcomes? A cross state analysis. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis 24*(4), 305–331.

Carnoy and Loeb examined the impact of rigorous state-level accountability requirements on student achievement. State systems were coded on a scale of 0–5. A score of 0 indicated that a state had no statewide accountability requirements; a score of 5 indicated that a state incorporated high school graduation exams and enforced strong school-level sanctions for schools with low student achievement. These scores were then compared to state scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), state 9th-grade retention levels, and state 12th-grade dropout rates in order to gauge the success of the policies.

Researchers found that states employing the highest level of sanctions tended to see larger achievement gains from 1996–2000 on the NAEP. At both the 4th- and 8th-grade levels across all racial and ethnic groups, states saw larger gains in scores relative to the degree of sanctions imposed by their accountability systems.

However, these gains in achievement did not translate to gains in other areas of student success. In particular, no association was found between stronger levels of accountability and higher 9th-grade retention rates or lower 12th-grade dropout levels. The researchers hypothesized that it may be too soon to measure the full impact of reform efforts for students who started school before the reform efforts were in place. In addition, higher performance on the NAEP may be due to students' increased testing skills, rather than any real changes in ability.

Summarized by Kerry Englert, senior evaluator

For another perspective on this issue, see http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n25/. Amrein-Beardsley, A. A., & Berliner, D. C. (2003, August 4). Re-analysis of NAEP math and reading scores in states with and without high-stakes tests: Response to Rosenshine. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 11*(25).

State Policies Regarding Teacher Licensure

Youngs, P., Odden, A., & Porter, A. C. (2003). State policy related to teacher licensure. *Educational Policy, 17*(2), 217–236.

According to Youngs, Odden, and Porter, prior to 1990 beginning teachers typically were assessed using standardized tests or assessments that measured basic skills, such as reading, writing, and mathematics. Since that time, the use of performance assessments has emerged. Such assessments employ alternative, authentic gauges of teaching capacity (often portfolios) that celebrate teachers' content knowledge, active learning opportunities provided by teachers for students, reflective practices, and the application of pedagogical knowledge.

Youngs et al. interviewed state education officials regarding policies for initial licensure in 2001–2002. The majority of states reported using tests of basic skills (74%), content knowledge (66%), or pedagogical knowledge (52%) for licensure decisions, although a small percentage (18%) used alternative assessments such as classroom observation and structured interviews. Youngs et al. assert that performance assessment adoption has been slow because of cost (training of assessors and mentors; pilot-testing, administering and scoring assessments), the need to gather reliability and validity evidence, and concerns that adopting performance assessments may contribute to teacher supply problems.

Youngs and his colleagues maintain that supply concerns may be mitigated by providing structured support (e.g., mentors, support teams) for incoming teachers, offering equitable salaries across districts, and prohibiting teaching outside one's content area. Finally, the researchers maintain that, though traditional measures of teacher quality are useful, they are incomplete. Performance assessments offer a more complete picture and can enhance teacher quality, although broader conceptions of alternative assessments may be necessary, such as using assessments formatively (e.g., to identify strengths) rather than just summatively (e.g., for licensing decisions).

Summarized by Sheila Arens, evaluator

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Kansas Implements Performance-based Teacher Licensure System

The advent of standards-based education in the early 1980s led to an increased emphasis not only on what children should *know*, but also on what they should be able to *do*. In Kansas, that same shift is taking place in teaching as the state implements an innovative performance-based teacher licensure system.

Kansas's new licensure system went into effect July 1, 2003, following more than 10 years of intensive development. Under the state's previous system, potential teachers were required to complete the coursework of an approved teacher preparation program and pass a pedagogy test. Teacher candidates also were required to maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.5 for a general license or content-area endorsement, and a GPA of 3.0 for advanced areas such as library science.

Under the new system, these requirements are still in place, but teachers receive a two-year conditional teaching license rather than a professional teaching license. Teachers working under a conditional license must complete the Kansas Performance Assessment during this time frame. This assessment, developed by a committee of practitioners and higher education faculty, can be completed at any point during a teacher's two-year conditional license period. Teachers select a unit they would like to be assessed on, administer pre- and post-tests to students on that unit, and turn in a report to the state department of education. The report includes student demographic data and a self-reflection piece, which details why teachers believe students did or did not learn, and what teachers might do differently in the future. Because the conditional license is renewable for an additional two years, if teachers do not succeed on their initial performance assessment, they are eligible to resubmit it.

As part of the new system, the state has developed performance educator preparation standards, which are categorized into three areas. *General education standards* act as guidelines for teacher preparation institutions and cover knowledge of communication, world cultures, mathematics, the natural world, the arts, and social, emotional, and physical well-being. The state's *professional education standards* were adapted from the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium's (INTASC) teacher standards. The state also has in place *content standards* for specific endorsement areas.

According to Martha Gage, Kansas Department of Education team leader for teacher education and licensure, the catalyst for the development of the performance-based teacher licensure program was the shift to a quality performance-based system for accrediting K–12 schools, the Kansas Quality Performance Accreditation system (QPA). When the state board of education approved the QPA, it also charged the state's Teaching and School Administration Professional Standards Advisory Board with developing a teacher preparation and licensure system in keeping with the spirit and intent of the performance-based accreditation system.

Although the performance-based licensure program has been in development for an extended time, Gage notes that its implementation coincides with the No Child Left Behind Act's requirement that each core academic classroom be staffed by a "highly qualified" teacher by the end of the 2005–2006 school year. "We're requiring teacher preparation institutions to offer majors or their equivalents in all of our teaching disciplines," says Gage. "That, combined with the required content and pedagogy tests, should ensure that all of our incoming teachers are highly qualified." cs

Wyoming Draws on McREL Research for School Improvement Process

The Wyoming Department of Education is committed to ensuring that schools and districts in the state have the tools and assistance they need to succeed. As part of this commitment, the state recently completed plans for the school improvement technical assistance process for schools and districts that are not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act. These schools and districts have been designated as "high priority." In developing the plans, the department has elected to use two McREL publications, *Classroom Instruction that Works* and *A Handbook for Classroom Instruction that Works*, along with the ASCD publication *What Works in Schools: Translating Research Into Action* (Marzano, 2001), which is based in part on research funded by McREL.

The first year of plan implementation consists of four phases. During the first phase, the state Department of Education will host meetings that provide superintendents across the state with each of the three books and an ASCD *What Works in Schools* video series. Although not all Wyoming schools and districts are classified as high priority, the Department believes it is important for all superintendents to understand the school improvement technical assistance process.

During the second phase, Department staff will hold regional meetings with personnel from high-priority schools and districts. At these meetings, each school or district's goals, target areas, and interventions in place at that time will be reviewed. During this phase, the Department also will administer the school/district self-study, a critical component of the school improvement technical assistance process. The self-study, which will be completed by individual staff and faculty members, addresses school improvement components including curriculum and instruction; assessment; parent/community involvement; culture for learning; leadership; organization, structure, and resources; professional development; and school improvement planning. Faculty and staff will be asked to judge the extent to which their schools engage in specific behaviors or address specific issues, and how a change in practice might increase students' academic achievement.

During the third phase, Department staff will visit high-priority districts and schools to meet with superintendents, principals, school improvement teams, parent representatives, and, at the high school level, students. The purpose of the visits will be to develop a sense of each school's current status and to begin reviewing each school's improvement plan. According to Kay Post, School Improvement Unit Director for the Wyoming Department of Education, schools often try to accomplish too much, rather than too little. "In this first year, we're asking schools to consider what they need to do, rather than to make immediate changes. Sometimes schools try to cover too much, and reviewing what is in place is critical in determining where a school needs to focus its energies."

During the fourth phase, to be conducted in the spring of 2004, Department of Education staff will return to schools for an on-site review of results from 2004 local assessments in each category in which the schools did not make AYP in 2003. According to Post, the Department is hopeful that schools will see increases in test scores in the first year of assistance. "We're approaching this as a catalyst to help schools identify their strengths and weaknesses and take whatever action *they* see as appropriate. We believe schools will respond to that."

essential resources

NEW! Online Standards Database: 4th Edition of Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science

by McREL. Available online at www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks

As part of its ongoing efforts to provide the best, most current information related to standards, McREL has undertaken a significant update of its online standards database. Currently, revised standards in language arts, mathematics, and science are available online; as the 4th edition for each subject area is completed, it will be added to the database. By the end of 2003, geography and economics will be placed online; by the end of 2004, the balance of the social studies (behavioral studies, civics, and history) also will have been revised. New features and additions include browsable topics, knowledge/skill statements, revised vocabulary terms, and prekindergarten benchmarks.

Helping At-Risk Students Meet Standards: A Synthesis of Evidence-Based Classroom Practices (2002)

by Zoe Barley, Patricia A. Lauer, Sheila A. Arens, Helen S. Apthorp, Kerry S. Englert, David Snow, and Motoko Akiba, 125 pages. Available in pdf format at www.mcrel.org

To help all children achieve at high levels, teachers need access to classroom practices that target children who are low performing or at risk of failure. This research synthesis evaluates evidence regarding the use of five strategies to help low-achieving students meet standards: cognitively oriented instruction, heterogeneous grouping structures, tutoring, peer tutoring, and computer-assisted instruction.

Leadership Folio Series: Guiding Comprehensive School Reform (2000)
Leadership Folio Series: Sustaining School Improvement (2003)

by McREL. Available in pdf format at www.mcrel.org

McREL's two folio series are designed to assist schools engaged in the challenges of initiating and sustaining comprehensive school reform. The first folio series, *Guiding Comprehensive School Reform*, includes guidance and suggestions for designing and implementing comprehensive school reform programs. The second folio series, *Sustaining School Improvement*, provides guidance for school leadership teams to help them meet the challenge of sustaining progress. This series is intended to help school leadership teams — teachers, administrators, and other school leaders — deal with the complexity of change by explaining what it takes to sustain improvement and by providing guidelines for addressing the factors that affect the ability to do so. Topics covered include professional development, communication, data-driven decision making, professional learning communities, and resource allocation.

Noteworthy Perspectives: Keeping the Focus on Learning (2002)

by Barbara B. Gaddy, Ceri B. Dean, and John S. Kendall, 44 pages. Available in pdf format at www.mcrel.org/topics/noteworthy.asp

Creating standards-based education systems is a challenging endeavor — one that has become more critical in light of the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. This edition of *Noteworthy* offers information that is useful for understanding some of the key issues that must be dealt with at the district, school, and classroom levels — developing a clear, specific, and complete view of what students are to learn and ensuring that curricula, instruction, and assessments are aligned with standards and focused on learning.

To obtain hard copies of these or other McREL publications, contact McREL's Resource Center at 303.337.0990.

e-sources

Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE)

CREDE is a federally funded research and development organization that conducts research intended to identify and develop effective education practices for minority students, including students considered at risk because of poverty or geographical location. Among the resources available on CREDE's site are five standards for effective pedagogy, online directories of pre-service and in-service teacher preparation programs, and research reports and briefs. **www.crede.ucsc.edu/**

Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)

CoSN is a nonprofit organization that promotes the use of the Internet and telecommunications to improve K–12 learning. The organization's goals include leadership development, advocacy, and coalition building. CoSN's website offers links, position papers, and other resources to help states, districts, and schools understand the complexities of bringing technology into schools. **www.cosn.org**

County Road 1 at McREL

County Road 1 at McREL is a collection of resources for rural communities interested in sustaining and improving their schools. The site provides information, services, and tools that address the unique needs of rural schools, including publications and data on rural schools and links to other sites devoted to rural education and community development. **www.mcrel.org/rural**

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA)

NCELA defines its mission as one of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information relating to the effective education of linguistically and culturally diverse learners in the United States. NCELA is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and operated by The George Washington University, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, Institute for Education Policy Studies. **www.ncela.gwu.edu**

No Child Left Behind, U.S. Department of Education

The No Child Left Behind website at the U.S. Department of Education offers a wealth of information for educators, parents, and the public on nuances of the Act. The site includes a news center, fact sheets on various aspects of the legislation, a list of frequently asked questions, and more. To access these features, along with nonregulatory guidance pertaining to Title III of the Act, link to **www.nclb.gov**.

policy briefs

No Child Left Behind: Realizing the Vision (April 2003)

by Louis Cicchinelli, Barbara Gaddy, Laura Lefkowits, and Kirsten Miller

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in early 2002, educators and policymakers have been focused on meeting the Act's requirements. This brief considers how thoughtful implementation of four key aspects of the Act — accountability and testing, flexible use of resources, school choice, and quality teachers and quality teaching — can move schools closer, not simply to compliance with the Act, but to realizing the Act's intent to raise achievement for all students.

The Reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act: Moving Toward a More Unified System (April 2002)

by Barbara Gaddy, Brian McNulty, and Tim Waters

As legislators prepare to reauthorize the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the debate over its provisions has intensified. This brief maintains that students will be better served by a more unified system of education in which special education is an integral component of school improvement, rather than a separate program.

Toward a Comprehensive Approach to Teacher Quality (November 2001)

by Robert Reichardt

Because many factors influence teaching, a comprehensive approach that touches on each stage of a teacher's career is the best strategy for improving teacher quality. This brief addresses four "points of opportunity" to influence teacher quality: pre-service, recruitment and selection, in-service, and retention.

These briefs and others are available at www.mcrel.org/topics/policyBrief.asp.

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English Language Learners *continued from page 1*

The consortium, made up of representatives from Alaska, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming, received a $1.89 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop an English language proficiency assessment for preK–12th grade students.

Although states face specific Title III accountability requirements related to English language learners, it is important to note that states also are required to include these students in the state assessment and accountability plans required under Title I. Specifically, English language learners are expected to meet the same academic standards as the general student population. English language learners also must participate in state academic assessments and meet annual measurable objectives in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. States, districts, and schools are required to disaggregate data for English language learners, and all other subgroups, in order to show adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward content standards. Should any subgroup in a school fail to meet AYP, that school could be identified as needing improvement.

Rural schools may face particular challenges as they work to meet the needs of English language learners. Many remote communities, already wrestling with teacher shortages and limited funding, must create English as a second language (ESL) programs from scratch. But rural schools may be at a disadvantage when it comes to receiving federal funding to develop ESL programs and provide other services for English language learners, according to Mari Rasmussen, assistant director for bilingual education at North Dakota's Department of Public Instruction.

Under NCLB formula grants, all states receive a minimum of $500,000 to serve English language learners. States receiving the minimum grant, such as North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana, will distribute $325,000 of that amount to districts in the form of subgrants; the remaining $175,000 will be set aside for the state's use in meeting overarching requirements of the Act, such as standards development, training, and assessment. Under the legislation, the minimum subgrant to a district is $10,000, which Rasmussen notes is unlikely to be sufficient for a district to develop a viable English language learner program. These districts almost certainly will have to tap other resources in order to ensure that English language learners receive appropriate services, including instruction by "highly qualified" teachers as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act.

Moving Forward

The No Child Left Behind Act grants states the flexibility to design programs that are most appropriate for their communities. However, appropriately serving English language learners and meeting the legislative requirements may entail creative solutions on the part of states, schools, and districts. Schools and districts, for example, might pool their resources or create consortia or other partnerships to share knowledge, expertise, and perhaps development costs.

Although states face specific Title III accountability requirements related to English language learners, it is important to note that states also are required to include these students in the state assessment and accountability plans required under Title I.

There are useful online resources available to assist educators as they go about this process. In addition to the U.S. Department of Education's non-regulatory guidance (see www.ed.gov/offices/OBEMLA/NRG1.2.25.03.doc), a key resource is the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA). Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, NCELA offers a technical assistance network directory, an online library, tools for classroom teachers, and more. For more information, see www.ncela.gwu.edu/. cs

McREL Expands Study of High-Performing, High-Needs Schools

Researchers have long been cognizant of the factors that classify schools as "high needs." In high-needs schools, educators often must battle steep odds, such as high poverty levels, in their mission to ensure that all children reach state standards. Despite the challenges, many of these schools boast impressive levels of student achievement. But why do some high-needs schools succeed, while others falter?

To help educators better understand what makes high-needs schools successful, McREL is conducting a study intended to extend prior research on high-performing, high-needs (HPHN) schools.

Clockwise from left: Mya Martin-Glenn, Pat Lauer, Kerry Englert, Zoe Barley, and Helen Apthorp. Not pictured: Becky Van Buhler.

Following two years of pilot studies, which focused on the separate roles of teaching practices and school-level policies in HPHN schools, McREL's research team designed a multi-site comparison study that contrasts factors in HPHN schools with those in low-performing, high-needs schools. In this study, which will take a broader, school-wide view, student achievement and student socioeconomic status will be used as classifying variables to identify successful HPHN schools. McREL intends to examine classroom practices; ways in which teachers learn; the role of leadership; and school-wide structures, climate, and context as possible correlates of success. Because previous research on HPHN schools has been hindered by small sample sizes, McREL plans to involve as many as 200 schools in the study, which initially will focus on elementary schools.

The research team will identify a sample of high- and low-performing schools, finalize survey development, recruit school participants, and collect data. Findings from the study will be used to develop a framework for organizing and refining the existing knowledge base regarding how to assist low-performing, high-needs schools.

The guiding research question of the study is "How do the policies and practices in HPHN schools compare with those in schools with similar demographics but lower achievement profiles?" McREL expects the study's findings to help school leaders tighten the links between school- and classroom-level factors of effectiveness. For example, the study's results are expected to shed light on the extent to which school leaders' ability to protect and expand learning time enhances teachers' capacity to adapt instruction to higher standards and diverse learning needs.

McREL's research and evaluation team brings a range of experience to the project. Team members and areas of focus include Helen Apthorp on pedagogy in literacy and mathematics; Pat Lauer on teacher quality and professional community; Zoe Barley on leadership; and Kerry Englert on school context, including assessment and monitoring and creating an orderly environment. The team is supported with research assistance and database design and management from Becky Van Buhler and project coordination and survey development from Mya Martin-Glenn.

For more information about the study, contact Helen Apthorp at 303.632.5622.

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the central region scene

colorado

A coalition of civil rights groups has filed a lawsuit challenging Colorado's voucher law on the grounds that it violates the state constitution. The law, which will allow low-income children in low-performing schools to receive vouchers to attend private schools, was signed by Gov. Bill Owens in April 2003. The lawsuit, filed in a state district court in Denver in May 2003, is based on a provision in the state constitution that prohibits the use of public money for schools operated by churches or sectarian groups.

kansas

The Kansas Board of Education has tentatively approved a $104 million budget increase request for the 2004–2005 school year. The proposal, which will be presented to the state legislature upon a final vote by the board, would increase state education funding by 4.3 percent over 2003–2004 levels. Elements of the proposal include an increase in per-pupil funding of $100 per student, a $25 million increase in special education funding, and $14 million for the intensive training of preschool and elementary school teachers in mathematics and reading.

missouri

Recently released NAEP scores indicate that Missouri's fourth and eighth graders have made substantial progress in reading since 1998. NAEP reading assessment results for 2002 ranked 32 percent of the state's fourth graders at or above the "proficient" level in reading, up from 28 percent in 1998 and compared to 29 percent for the nation in 2002. Thirty-four percent of Missouri eighth graders scored at or above the proficient level, up six percentage points from 1998 levels. Nationwide, 31 percent of eighth graders scored at or above the proficient level in reading in 2002.

nebraska

State legislators have overridden Gov. Mike Johann's vetoes of their proposed education budget. The governor had proposed a nine percent funding decrease to Nebraska's school districts for the 2003–2004 school year; the legislative override whittles the proposed 9.0 percent cut to a 3.6 percent cut.

north dakota

The Bismarck School District will add written and online tests beginning in the fall of 2003, in an effort to meet requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act. Students in grades 3 through 8 will take online tests in reading and math; students in grades 6 and 9 will take pencil-and-paper writing tests. Tenth-grade students will take a pre-ACT test. The assessment plan is projected to cost the district at least $75,000 annually.

south dakota

Gov. Mike Rounds has announced the appointment of Rick Melmer as Secretary of the Department of Education. Melmer takes over from Interim Secretary Tom Hawley, who will return to his former position as dean of the College of Education at Dakota State University. Prior to joining the department in June 2003, Melmer spent eight years as superintendent of schools for South Dakota's Watertown School District. From 1991 to 1995, Melmer served as superintendent of the Sioux Center Community School District, Sioux Center, Iowa.

wyoming

Several task forces and study groups are being convened in Wyoming to address specific areas of study required by the state legislature. In particular, a student assessment and accountability task force is expected to develop a proposal to align existing statewide assessments with requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. The task force also is responsible for designing rewards and sanctions for schools in line with the Act.

For more information on Central Region state education issues, link to the following state department of education websites:

Colorado: www.cde.state.co.us
Kansas: www.ksbe.state.ks.us
Missouri: www.dese.state.mo.us
Nebraska: www.nde.state.ne.us
North Dakota: www.dpi.state.nd.us
South Dakota: www.state.sd.us/deca
Wyoming: www.k12.wy.us

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As a member of the Oglala Lakota Nation and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, McREL Board Member Cheryl Kulas has always felt it is her responsibility to serve others. "In the Native community, one of our core values is that we have a responsibility to give back. In my case, I've always been drawn to improving education for Native and other minority children."

Cheryl's commitment is borne out by her extensive involvement with diverse populations. She began her career as the project director of the University of North Dakota's early childhood education center, where she administered and maintained operations for two centers serving 48 preschool Indian children. In this capacity, she also developed the Child Development Associate Training Program for staff in collaboration with the University of North Dakota Center for Teaching and Learning. Cheryl also has worked as an economic planner for the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Tribe and as a consultant for Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity. She currently serves as the executive director for the North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission for the state of North Dakota. In addition to her board service with McREL, which began in 2003, Cheryl has served on the board of directors for the National Indian Education Association.

Cheryl Kulas

Cheryl believes that before educators can begin to address diversity issues in their schools and classrooms, they must understand culture in a broader context. Central to Cheryl's work is addressing the gap in academic achievement between American Indian/Alaska Native students and mainstream students. Cheryl points out that high performance expectations for racially, ethnically, and economically diverse students also must be accompanied by supports that can positively impact student performance.

Cheryl notes that the diverse populations represented on McREL's board help McREL view education issues through a variety of cultural filters. By understanding the demographic and socioeconomic issues of different cultures, she says, McREL is better positioned to provide products and services to meet the needs of the entire Central Region. McREL's recently completed diversity roundtable series, in which educators gathered to discuss diversity issues and learn about recent research, is but one example of such a service.

Cheryl has two grown children and two grandchildren, all of whom live in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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changing schools

fall 2003

a newsletter from the central region educational laboratory

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This publication has been funded at least in part with federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-01-CO-0006. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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